Engaging in ʿilm al-kalām is permissible and even obligatory for some.

— Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī [d. 606 AH]

Some of the Ḥashwiyyah among the Ḥanabilah and the scholars of ḥadīth hold the position, that engaging in ʿilm al-kalām is forbidden (ḥarām). Those who prohibited ʿilm al-kalām argue that this is a science that the Companions (ṣaḥābah) did not discuss nor inquire about at all, and everything that the Companions did not discuss or inquire about is considered an innovation (bidʿah); thus, this knowledge is an innovation (bidʿah), and every innovation must be avoided. Therefore, ʿilm al-kalām is something that must be avoided.

My response is that, it is not permissible to claim that the Companions (ṣaḥābah) did not seek evidence (adillah) for the existence of the Creator (ṣāniʿ) and His attributes (ṣifāt), nor for the Prophethood (nubuwwat) of the Chosen One, Muṣṭafā (ʿalayhi salām), because they were obligated to know this.

The way to attain knowledge (maʿārif) is either through sensory perception (ḥiss), or through narration (khabar), or through reasoning (naẓar). There is no way to attain this knowledge (ʿilm al-kalām) through sensory perception, as they did not see Allāh taʿālā, nor did they hear His Glorious Speech (khiṭāb) [Qurʾān].

His knowledge (ʿilm) of the good (khayr) through another informant (mukhbir) is an infinite regress, and knowledge of the good cannot be obtained without first knowing that it is true (ṣidq). If the knowledge of the truth of that good depends on another piece of good, it leads to an infinite regress.

Thus, there is no way to attain this knowledge (maʿārif) except through reasoning (naẓar), and this knowledge is obligatory (wājib) to acquire. Whatever is necessary to fulfill an obligation is itself obligatory; therefore, reasoning about these evidences (adillah) is obligatory.

If we were to say that the Companions (ṣaḥābah) did not know these evidences and did not inquire about them, while it is impossible for them to acquire this knowledge except

through them, it would follow that they were not believers, and this is disbelief (kufr). Therefore, the invalidity of their claim is established.

If it is said: Suppose they were knowledgeable (ʿālimīn) about the evidences (adillah), but they did not use the terms commonly employed by the theologians (mutakallimīm), such as substance (jawhar) and accident (ʿaraḍ), then their use would be considered an innovation (bidʿah).

We respond: Likewise, they did not use in their legal (fiqh) discussions the common terms like nullification (naqḍ), breaking (kasr), prevention (manʿ), and claim (muṭālabah), nor did they discuss the furūʿ of Ibn al-Ḥaddād, or the subtleties of the meanings in the Book of al-Zajjāj, and so forth; thus, it must be concluded that all of that would be considered an innovation (bidʿah).

The Companions (ṣaḥābah) did not use these terms because there were few innovations (bidʿah) and weak corrupt desires (hawāʾ) at that time. However, in our time, the world is filled with innovations; therefore, we need an increased refinement in the evidences (adillah) and the use of specific expressions to make them closer to refuting their false beliefs and to clarify the truth more easily.

Among the arguments of those who prohibited ʿilm al-kalām presented is:

The prophet Muḥammad ﷺ's saying:

"Reflect on the creation (makhlūq), but do not reflect on the Creator (khāliq)."

They said: To reflect on the fact that He is knowledgeable by essence (dhāt) or by knowledge (ʿilm), or that He is seen (marʾī) or not seen (ghayr marʾī), all of this is to reflect on the Creator, which is prohibited.

We respond: We acknowledge that reflecting on the Creator is not permissible because the one who contemplates it only arrives at a corrupt belief (ʿaqīda fāsiḍa) or a bewildering confusion (ḥayra), as seen with the anthropomorphists (mushabbihah) and the deniers (muʿaṭṭilah).

Rather, one must reflect on the created beings (makhlūqāt) in terms of their indication of the existence of the Creator (ṣāniʿ) and His attributes (ṣifāt), which is what we are commanded to do when reflecting on the creation.

Those who prohibited ʿilm al-kalām also presented as evidence from the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ's saying:

"Stick to the faith of the elderly women."

We respond: The intended meaning is to follow them in entrusting matters to Allāh, refraining from disputes and harm, and seeking assistance from Allāh in all affairs.

This refutes what they claimed.

📚 • al-Ishārah fī Uṣūl al-Kalām.